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DECORATIVE ART IN LONDON.

BY HENRY B. WHEATLEY.

WE English, as a rule, are so much fonder of facts than theories that it is pretty certain when the newspapers become didactic that times are dull and incidents few. This has been the case lately in London, and we are now only just waking into life again. One of the topics that has been discussed with wearisome iteration is the building of new houses, and as there is a floating population nowadays which is always moving from house to house, there is no dearth of those who wish to rush into the discussion. One satisfactory fact that can be gleaned from this is that, with all the faults of construction, which are numerous, public opinion has been brought to bear upon the builder with such success that the houses are improving every day. Aspect and prospect are still too much ignored, and there is a certain amount of reason in Mr. Ruskin's strong condemnation of the wretched rows of houses which stretch out in every direction. The Professor says: "The tendency of the entire national energy is to approximate more and more to the state of a squirrel in a cage, or a turnspit in a wheel fed by foreign masters with nuts and dog's meat." Doubtless, a man's surroundings must more or less influence his character, but many an ugly exterior hides a truly artistic interior, and, as a rule, we care very little for the look of the outsides of our houses. Some of those who hold very strongly to the opinion that the eye should be cultivated by the sight of beautiful objects have formed a society for the purpose of adorning the walls of public schools with pictures and drawings, to be called the "Art for Schools' Association." This is a curious illustration of the reaction against the Spartan system of education once prevalent. Mr. Ruskin is president of this association.

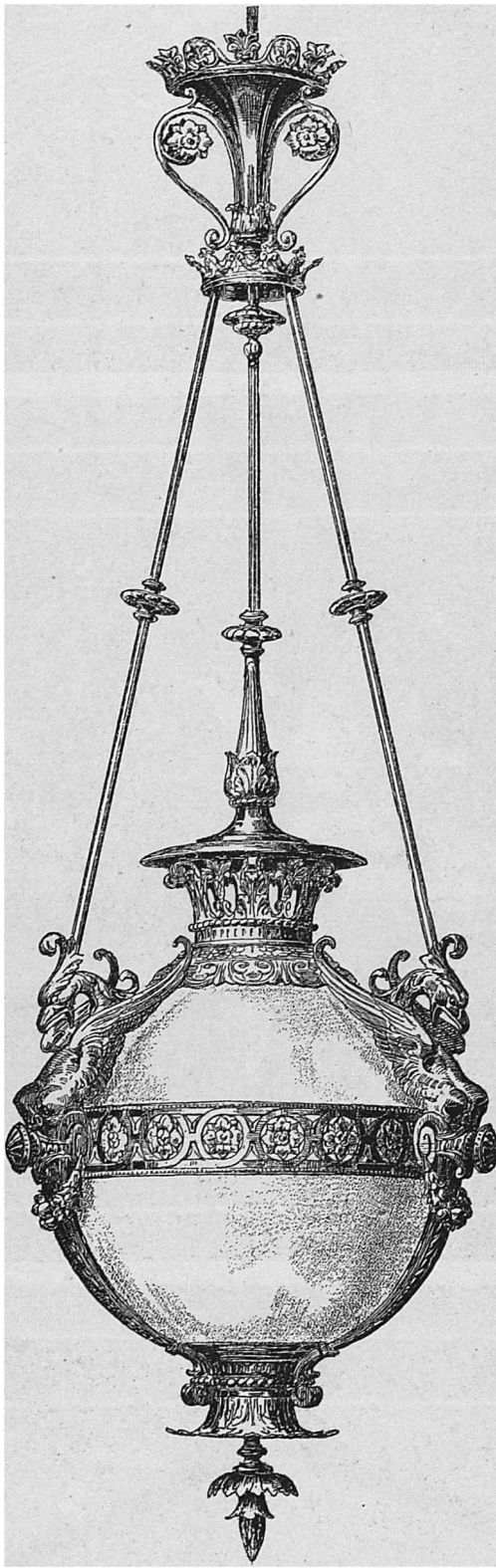
Art galleries and exhibitions are becoming more numerous over the country, and several have been opened lately. Lord Egerton of Falton, when opening an exhibition at Stockport, advocated an improved art education, and said that although we could not emulate the Italian who was surrounded by beauty, we could do something to disseminate a better knowledge of true artistic principle. Lord Carlingford opened a Permanent Art Gallery at Manchester, and pointed out that the taste of the present day was to turn away from "grisly saints and martyrs hoary," and to be attracted by pictures which illustrated the life of our own times. This view, however, must not be pressed too far, and those who wish to cultivate their taste will do well to visit the Raphael Exhibition at the British Museum, where they will see 152 carbon photographs of studies, sketches and drawings arranged by Mr. Reid, the Keeper of the Prints. Still it is a hopeful sign of life in modern school painting that the artists transfer to their canvasses what they themselves have seen, for an art that deals only with archaic things is at best a dead art. Treating pictures in the somewhat low light of mere decorative objects, it is certainly more pleasing to see upon the walls of our living rooms an idealised view of every-day life rather than representations of gods and goddesses or saints and martyrs for whom we feel little or no interest. The works of one of our greatest artists are not to be found on the walls of any gallery, but they have a wider circulation and help to educate a larger number than those who ever enter a picture gallery. Mr. Tenniel has little time to elaborate his designs, for the cartoons of *Punch* must be left to the last moment, as a single day may change the political situation and upset the plans of the artist. An interesting notice of Mr. Tenniel has been lately printed in *Truth*, from which we learn that with the exception of a week or two some years ago his drawings have appeared regularly week after week without intermission since 1851. Here is a man who never has a holiday.

An ingenious application of the principle of co-operation has lately been tried at Newbury with success in the form of a Stained Glass Window Society, and now one is being started for Hungerford parish church. The aim of the founders is to enroll a sufficient number of members paying an annual sum of 5s. to allow of the addition of one window to the church every two years.

I have already alluded to the remarkable collection of artistic and industrial objects which Mr. Purdon Clarke collected in India, and has now arranged at the South Kensington Museum. In another part of this same building a very fine collection of oriental woodwork is exhibited. These objects of Arab art brought from Cairo are lent by the owner, Mons. de St. Maurice, and they illustrate the domestic life of the East in a very

remarkable manner. Whole rooms are shown with the furniture arranged in proper positions. There are gorgeous wall mosaics, open lattice work, and decorated ceiling-beams and cornices of wood. Elegant interlacing patterns are seen on all sides in profusion.

The re-decoration of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral has been talked of for many years, and at last something is to be done towards carrying out a very elaborate and expensive scheme. Mr. Poynter and Mr. Hugh Stannus have undertaken to furnish designs from the *Book of Revelation*, one of these being the Sea giving up her Dead. Mr. Poynter is engaged on the figure of St. John receiving from the angels a pen and a book where-with and in which to write his vision. The figure is thirteen feet high. It is proposed to put these pictures on canvass over Thornhill's designs, and then if they are approved of, the paintings will be



DESIGN FOR LAMP FOR ELECTRIC LIGHT.

replaced by mosaic. If this scheme is carried out in its integrity we shall have in Wren's magnificent church one of the most elaborate attempts at mural decoration ever attempted in England.

Mr. M. E. James has just published a useful little book entitled, "How to Decorate our Ceilings, Walls and Floors" (George Bell & Sons), which contains much practical information for those who wish to beautify their houses. He says: "An ugly, square, commonplace room may be made charming by its occupant, and its occupant may be made happy by the work of decorating it." How this can be brought about he sets himself to answer, and in his pages he describes the following styles of decoration: the Celtic, Classical, Egyptian, Floral, Japanese, Moorish and Renaissance, all of which are illustrated by plates. There are probably many persons who would be glad to attempt something of the kind, if they knew how to set about it. Ordinary doors are peculiarly

fitted for amateur decoration, and many rooms would be greatly improved by a tasteful ornamentation such as is suggested by Mr. James.

The need of a Masonic Temple is now greatly felt, and steps are being taken to replace that which was destroyed by the great fire at the Freemason's Tavern. The estimate of the total expenditure for remodelling the whole structure amounts to £40,000.

London is not particularly well supplied with public clocks, but one is just about to be added to the scanty list. A clock case has long stood out from the tower of the new Royal Courts of Justice, but it has not told the time. New fittings and new dials are now to be put in, and the hours will be struck on a three-and-a-half ton bell, the quarters being given by smaller bells. The dials of opal glass are eight feet six inches in diameter, and at night will be lighted by gas. Eventually it is intended to use electricity. Some fifteen years ago, when the colonnade of old Burlington House, Piccadilly, was pulled down, London lost one of its most charming architectural features. The destruction was inevitable, but some men of taste in the House of Commons, led by Mr. Beresford Hope, urged that the colonnade should be re-erected elsewhere. In consequence the stones were numbered as they were taken down and moved to Battersea Park. There from that time to this they have remained exposed to all weathers, and no attempt has been made to find a suitable site for them. A movement is now set on foot for the purpose of pressing upon the Government the need of caring for and re-erecting these neglected stones. I sincerely trust that this scandalous neglect may no longer continue, and that a piece of architecture which aroused even Horace Walpole to enthusiasm may again grace our city.

There has been a great outcry lately respecting the present system of removing the dust of London. Offensive odors arise from the dust-yards, and in loading the barges on the Paddington Canal so much dust has fallen over into the water that the bottom of the canal is lined with disgusting mud which poisons the air of the neighborhood. Something must be done to remedy this insanitary condition of one of our chief suburbs or we may expect some very serious evil to ensue.

I have alluded in former letters to the complaints which have so long been common as to the ordinary plumber, and now I see that municipal authorities of Bradford have taken the matter in hand. They have issued byelaws respecting gas as well as waterpipes, and they propose to license duly qualified plumbers. They go even farther than this and wish to prevent those who have not taken the license from working in their borough, but it is somewhat doubtful whether they can carry this prohibition out successfully.

A curious instance of the difficulty there is in an emergency of utilising the best arranged system of protection has just occurred in the fire at Cortachy Castle, the seat of the Earl of Airlie, but at the time occupied by the Earl and Countess of Dudley. Many fine carvings have been burnt, and there has been a considerable destruction of valuable property. A complete water system had been arranged for use in case of fire, and printed directions for the manipulation of the apparatus were placed upon the walls. Nobody, however, read them, and in the panic no one knew what to do.

Professor Pettenkofer, the distinguished German chemist, has made some experiments at Munich on the temperature and quality of the air in buildings lighted by electricity and gas respectively. He found that in an empty theatre the increase of temperature in the upper gallery was ten times as great when gas was used in place of electricity, but in a full house the difference was not nearly so great, it was in fact a difference of 10.8 degrees Fahr. in a full house, against 15 degrees in an empty house. In the same way, the difference in amount of carbonic acid is not so great in a full as in an empty house. With gas light there are in a full house 23 parts in 10,000, and with the electric light 18 parts in 10,000. This seems to show that the ventilation was quite insufficient, and it is to be hoped that further experiments may be carried out in respect to this very interesting question.

A movement is set on foot to do honor to William Murdoch, who first practically applied coal gas as a means of illumination for domestic and industrial purposes, and Mr. Macfie has given a lecture in aid of the movement. It is proposed to obtain subscriptions for the purpose of purchasing Murdoch's house near the Old Soho Works and turning it into an International Gas Museum, and also for obtaining a statue to be placed on the Thames Embankment. At this beginning of October there are signs of renewed work and energy in various directions, and I shall hope to have more to record in my next letter.